

Dis/Art, (This) Labour Transfiguration in the Age of Precarity and Disposability

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Abstract

This essay intends to call into question the relationship between art and labor in the present age of precarity and disposability while, at the same time, recognizing their common ontological provenance. It describes the political and ontological rupture whereby both art and labor return to themselves, to their *radix*, which is itself a poetic and practical vortex. This can unleash new powers for a reshaping of singularities and a grounding of the common. Transfiguration and transformation become possible, while the stability of number (especially ‘the one’), which is neither of poiesis nor praxis, becomes likely to vacillate and fall.

1. The Border and the Vortex

The title of this essay intends to call into question any easy connection between art and labour in the present age, while, at the same time, acknowledging the profound ontological relation between these two types of human activity. The “Dis” in Dis/Art signals, first of all, a displacement of art in the gig and “creative” economy, but also points to the rupture present in the singularity of art itself. There is art against art, just in the same way in which there is movement (not *a* movement) within the ontological vortex of social being—movement without number—such that all reshaping of time, space, and life (social time and space and everyday life) constantly reaches a point of—perhaps dangerous—renewal. In this sense, it is the politics of numbers that must be questioned—as well as the politics of danger. But where the danger is, there is the saving power, too—as Friedrich Hölderlin says in the hymn “Patmos”.¹ This being against and this rhythmic shock are part of the same non-numeric actions—constantly creating difference.² It is action, or process—a process of individuation, or rather transindividuation all the time. Thus we come to the second phrase in the title, (*This*) Labour. The word “this” is obviously a key ontological term.³ Something (anything) is individuated as *this*, but always in a

problematic way and always through transindividuation.⁴ We will say more about this (and *this*) later. In a way that is perhaps counterintuitive, but nonetheless true, *this* is always less than numerical, or, again, non-numerical—despite the fact that one may refer to it as “this one”. Granted, there cannot be two instances of it, of the same.⁵ Yet, it is not even one as such—or better, the oneness of the one—what might appear as being one—must be called into question and deconstructed, and this is done through transindividuation itself.⁶ In our particular case, “this” is part of the phrase “(This) Labour”. Here, labour will be understood as the most common ontological power of the social world, the most common concept within it—to keep it with John Duns Scotus—but also according to the concept of the multiplication of labour elaborated by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, as they speak of the many “figures of labour”.⁷ The parentheses around the word “this” as well as the slash between “dis” and “art” in the first phrase of the title, indicate a border zone.⁸ It is within this border zone that the problematic inner relations of art on the one hand, and those of labour on the other, as well as the equally problematic relations between art and labour as such, can be detected and appreciated. Thus, in keeping with Étienne Balibar and Mezzadra and Neilson, the border is not simply a limit. With a reference to JohannGottfried Fichte, Balibar speaks of “invisible borders, situated everywhere and nowhere”.⁹ Indeed, he also says, “some borders are no longer situated at the borders at all”¹⁰ For their part, working with the logic of inclusion and exclusion, Mezzadra and Neilson say that “borders are equally devices of inclusion that select and filter people and different forms of circulation in ways no less violent than those deployed in exclusionary measures”.¹¹ To speak about the border is always to speak about border struggles. Thus, a border is the vortex within which the often dangerous and tumultuous reshaping of life happens. This also brings to the fore the question of inclusion and exclusion, which cannot be settled as an either/or question.¹² For instance, to be included as the excluded ones is an occurrence more common than might sight appear at first—in any given situation. In this sense, it is important to call attention to another dimension of the meaning conveyed by the prefix “dis” in the title. Together with the “dis” of displacement, it is also that of disposability. Here, it is not simply a question of art and labour, but of life as such. Disposable lives have become a common occurrence, and this is one of the meanings of biopolitics today—the meaning of the social factory,¹³ the prison extended to society,¹⁴ or the camp as the paradigm of political modernity.¹⁵ This is also the meaning of the war against intelligence, the class war at the global level, violence, racism, and war as such (i.e., police and military operations). Precarity and disposability are two of the terms that describe and characterise the current time in a special way, for, just like labour, they touch upon and truly underlie all aspects of the social and of everyday life for a growing number of people, often for entire populations (in accordance with the principles of biopolitics and biopower). In a dystopic way, they do bring about a disfiguration of everything, and truly of the human face. It is in this context that an ontological rupture in which both art and labour return to themselves, to their *radix*, which is itself a poetic and practical vortex, can unleash new powers for a reshaping of singularities and a grounding of the common. It is here that transfiguration and transformation become possible.

2. Life and Work

The discourse on art and labour has greatly changed recently, and any attempt to distinguish between artistic and “mere” production is bound to stumble upon the demands and difficulties created under neoliberalism by the new digital, sharing and gig economy. Rather interestingly, the word “gig” originates in the art world, particularly music. As George Morgan and Pariece Nelligan say, “More workers are now living like musicians—working precariously from gig to gig”.¹⁶ This, however, does not mean that all production is now geared towards the creation of artworks in the traditional sense—the sense illustrated by Martin Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935–1935), for instance.¹⁷ Rather, what this means is that living and working in the entrepreneurial and debt society entails a constant effort at producing one’s own subsistence, one’s own means of production even—as is the case in all uberised activities and jobs—as well as one’s own self: one’s subjectivity,

or singularity.

The distance between art and labour has shrunk, or disappeared, in the same way in which the distance between life and work has been taken away by all those activities whose produced value is immeasurable and that virtually entail a 24/7 working lifestyle. This is particularly evident in all uberised forms of labour, in the field of care, the IT jobs, the arts proper, but also in the often nightmarish work of migrants as they cross continents and oceans fleeing wars and economic devastation in search of a better future.¹⁸ This is work that never ends, which produces value that cannot be measured and that entails a constant renewal and sharpening of creative skills as well as a permanent intersectional expenditure of physical, mental and emotional forces.

The situation is one in which subjectivities—and really, singularities—are produced in conditions of often great subjection. At times, this subjection is confirmed in and by the new subjectivities produced. This is the case when a sense of conformity is internalised to the point that subjection is, as it were, “voluntarily” accepted and servitude “voluntarily” entered into. Other times—and our hope is that this might increasingly be the most common occurrence—the new subjectivities are produced on the basis of a more or less clear, conscious and planned project of liberation. This happens when a subversion of understood conditions of subjection is attempted and initiated. What follows in this case is a transformation, a transfiguration, of the self—the making of entirely new singularities, perhaps equal, in a Nietzschean manner, to artworks. In the first instance, when subjection and servitude are internalised and confirmed, we have the production of discrete individuals under the illusion of independence and freedom. In the second instance, the transfiguration happens in the common and is of the common. In both instances, there is a process of transindividuation at work.¹⁹ The difference lies in accepting or refusing to accept the dictates of discipline and control imposed by capital, biopower and the neoliberal biopolitical system. In other words, the difference lies in obedience or refusal and resistance—and rebellion. Again, in the first instance, the fictional notion of the free and independent individual, the “*sovereign individual... master of a free will*”,²⁰ “a kingdom within a kingdom” appears as real to a degree.²¹ In the second instance, this notion is shattered, or simply evaded, by engaging in a process geared towards true liberation. This process entails an understanding of being-with, the ontological constitution of a plural singularity, and the common.²²

At times, the word subjectivity, or singularity, is used as a magic word, as if it by default indicates a progressive or even revolutionary mentality and existence. In truth, even subjected subjectivities are, precisely, subjectivities. Furthermore, we are all subjected, to various degrees. Subjectivity, or singularity, is, as I have noted above, always the result of a process of transindividuation. But transindividuation can take different directions, and the point, as Jason Read notes in his book on transindividuality, is not to simply say that everything is transindividual. Rather, the point is to understand why and how the process of transindividuation often disappears from the result, and what appears instead is the unity of the free and independent individual, masking the process itself.²³ Indeed, the most central historical question in Read’s book is, “How can social relations produce their own effacement?” He says that transindividuality, or transindividuation, can be examined from an ontological and historical viewpoint. In particular, he says that “while the ontological question is to understand how it is that the individual emerges from collective conditions, the historical question is how to grasp the effacement of the collective conditions of individuation.”²⁴

This does not mean that one chooses between servitude and liberation, subjection and freedom in a voluntaristic way, which is the way criticised by Read, following in particular the thoughts of Baruch Spinoza and Karl Marx. Other authors take the same position in relation to the question of free choice. Notably, Frédéric Lordon, in his book on capitalism and desire, strongly rejects the notion that there is such a situation in which

one freely chooses.²⁵ His ideas are also, like in the case of Read, particularly shaped by the thought of Spinoza—and that of Marx. Indeed, he says that there is no voluntary servitude, but only—and always—passionate servitude. The difference between servitude and freedom lies in understanding the causes of our passions—in keeping with Spinoza— but also, and consequently, in a movement of rupture, in the power of acting. Lordon says, “When the indignation that gets people moving prevails over the *obsequium* that makes them stay put, a new affective vector is formed, and individuals who used to be determined to respect institutional norms (for example, those of the employment relation) are suddenly determined to sedition.”²⁶ Although the word “individuals” is used here, it is obvious that we are on the plane of transindividuality, which also includes the preindividual play of affective forces. Indeed, Lordon emphasises that it is not a matter of using one’s free will, but of following one’s sensuous and emotional disposition and inclination. He says that indignation “overturns the affective equilibria that have until then determined the subjects to submit to institutional relations, and leads them to desire to live, not according to their free will, but *as it pleases them—ex suo ingenio*—which implies, not some miraculous leap into the unconditioned, but a step into a life *determined in another way*.”²⁷ Obviously, one way in which this happens is through the refusal of work. As Stevphen Shukaitis says: “The refusal of work plays a key role in fermenting class struggle as it provides a framework for moving from discontent to action, underpinned by a concrete utopian desire to reduce and, if possible, eliminate the influence of work over social life.”²⁸ Work is here obviously understood, as it should be, as a form of servitude and capture. The chapter “Learning Not to Labour, in Shukaitis’s book refers to Paul Willis’s important title, *Learning to Labour* (1977)—important even for the discourse on art and labour we are drawing on today.²⁹ The difference is that the mechanism of social reproduction analysed and described by Willis, which led working-class kids to work in the factory, has been altered in many ways, as precarity and disposability have become increasingly more predominant. For Shukaitis the question is then how to develop a kind of “zerowork training”, able to produce new forms of subjectivation,³⁰ where “the *refusal* of work” is also “the *re-fusing* of the social energies of such refusal back into supporting the continued affective existence and capacities of other forms of life and ways of being together.”³¹ This is, I believe, what the return of labour to itself and of art to itself also means.

Perhaps this is what the production of rebellious subjectivities implies: a rupture driven by desire towards another way that is both affective and artistic—thus, the importance of situations like the art strike, and even more so, the international women’s strike. In addition to its Spinozian character, this rupture is also in line with the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Marx. It is the new direction pointed out by Nietzsche when, after the abolition of metaphysics, after the destructive moment, he also sees in art and the sensuous a constructive going beyond, an immanent transcendence. Thus, he says, “An anti-metaphysical view of the world—yes, but an artistic one”.³² He also says that art is to become “the real task of life”.³³ This does not mean that people have necessarily to engage with one of the fine arts; rather, it means that life itself should be produced artistically. In fact, he continues, “art as life’s *metaphysical* activity”.³⁴ This is obviously no longer the metaphysics of the Platonic tradition, which Nietzsche wants to destroy with a hammer. It is not the metaphysics of the split between a real world of ideas and a world of mere appearances. In fact, both worlds are destroyed. In *The Twilight of the Idols* (1889), Nietzsche says, “The ‘real’ world—an idea no longer of any use, not even a duty any longer—an idea grown useless, superfluous, *consequently* a refuted idea: let us abolish it!” Yet, with the abolition of the “real” world, the world of appearances is also abolished. Nietzsche continues, “We have abolished the real world. What world is left? the apparent world perhaps?... But no! *with the real world we have abolished the apparent world!*”³⁵ What remains is *this world, the world we are*.³⁶ It is in this sense that one understands the “metaphysical”, *ontological*, role of art. It is part of a poetic metaphysics, a poetic ontology, in Giambattista Vico’s sense of the word. Indeed, in Vico, the true is the same as the made, and *poiesis* and *praxis* are together responsible for the constitution of the self, the common, and the world.³⁷ It is interesting that, in this way, Vico’s

poetic doing and making and Nietzsche's aesthetic overcoming of metaphysics announce a world in which the production of what one is—and constantly is not—the production of subjectivity, has indeed become *the real task of life*; real, but ultimately also necessary and, often in a negative sense—such as when it is looked at through the logic of debt—a serious and inescapable injunction.³⁸

As for Marx, we can look at the question of the emancipation of the senses in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. In line with the emphasis on subjectivity present in the *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), here Marx speaks of the changes—a rupture—in the human subject following the coming of a communist future, the abolition of private property. He says, “The supersession of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become *human*, subjectively as well as objectively.”³⁹ Here, too, there is a poetic and practical ontology. Marx says, “The senses have therefore become *theoreticians* in their immediate praxis.”⁴⁰ He also says, “The eye has become a *human eye*, just as its *object* has become a social, *human object*.”⁴¹ Just as in Nietzsche, the sensuous is what remains after the destruction of metaphysics, and, following the senses with their “subtlety, plenitude, and power”,⁴² the world becomes art, a work of art, or work as art, so in Marx the senses go back to *their immediate praxis*. The result is a transformation, or transfiguration, of the world and of the subject—a making of new subjectivities, or singularities.

Yet, the ideas of the emancipation of the senses and of art as the real task of life have to be seen in relation to the new technologies that call into question the notion of the simply human; that is to say, they have to be considered in the context of the machinic assemblage, of the transindividual relation of humans and machines—of which more will be said later—and of the common. Indeed, it is not the case—and that certainly was not the case with Marx—that an individual as such could overcome the rift between necessity and contingency, theory and praxis, desire and action. Certainly, the individual is always social—a transindividuation, though that may often not appear to be the case. Indeed, the lingering of appearance—of *this* appearance—may in itself be the problem: appearance and representation. Indeed, the emancipation of the senses and the notion of art as the real task of life imply a critique of appearance and representation—and, for that matter, of sovereignty. Yet, we still have to start from the fundamental idea that representation is the exact opposite of care; *sovereignty* is the exact opposite of care. From here we can proceed to an appreciation of what the rupture we have been describing might entail in progressive and revolutionary ways.

3. Creativity and Art

Art is always a form of labour, in the generic sense of making and doing. Indeed, as I wrote in *Labor of Fire* (2005), “how can art be something other than labor?”⁴³ Labour is not always art, but in the neoliberal economy the distinction between the two categories is, as we have seen, complicated by the fact that work is not simply an activity geared towards the production of external commodities, of value congealed in those commodities, and the surplus-value that follows from that, but it entails a production of the self, of the subjectivity of the worker, and in this sense it also entails the implementation of creative skills that one might usually associate with artistic production. They also produce a surplus. Art can no longer claim to be an independent and separate realm. Indeed, there is perhaps no art as such anymore. I am not saying this in a complaining voice. It is rather in the sense already meant by Marx as he discusses abstract labour, “*labor pure and simple*”, in the *Grundrisse* (1857–58).⁴⁴ There he says that “labor loses all the characteristics of art; as its particular skill becomes something more and more abstract and irrelevant, and as it becomes more and more a *purely abstract activity*”.⁴⁵ In the age of finance capital, this is even more important than at the time when Marx was writing. Certainly, Marx's idea

of labour “as *absolute poverty*” on the one hand and as “the *general possibility* of wealth” on the other, a split between the objective and subjective dispositions of labour, is even more apparent today than in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ Marx says that labour is *absolute poverty* “not as shortage, but as total exclusion of objective wealth,” while it is “the *general possibility* of wealth as subject and as activity”.⁴⁷ The figure of the indebted man described by Maurizio Lazzarato,⁴⁸ with the constant injunction to become an entrepreneur of the self, is a perfect illustration of this apparent contradiction, or rather of the contradiction that follows “from the essence of labour, such as it is *presupposed* by capital as its contradiction and as its contradictory being, and such as it, in turn, presupposes capital”.⁴⁹

In 1967, Guy Debord wrote, “Art’s declaration of independence is thus the beginning of the end of art.”⁵⁰ The end of art, we now see, means its diffusion throughout society, “in the social factory”, through “social production”.⁵¹ As Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri say, “Value is produced in the social factory that stretches across the entire social terrain and throughout the sites of production and reproduction.”⁵² This diffusion, in turn, means that all labouring activities, all life activities, have to have elements and dimensions that perhaps in the past belonged to art proper. So, if on the one hand, as Marx says, labour, as abstract labour “loses all the characteristics of art”⁵³—and this is the case under the industrial regime of production— it needs, on the other hand, to become *artful* in the new economy of debt and finance, “an apparatus that directly captures and extracts value from social production”.⁵⁴ For an increasing number of people, making a living, even at the level of mere survival, implies the ability to juggle many temporary jobs all at the same time, to move from place to place, within the same—“creative”—city or across countries and continents—with the important psychological and existential toll that all this takes. This is the meaning of the gig economy we mentioned earlier. In a very recent book by Morgan and Nelligan, the notion of the positive importance of creativity in the neoliberal economy is called into question.⁵⁵ With a reference to Richard Florida’s popular book, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2003) in particular,⁵⁶ Morgan and Nelligan point out an interesting passage from *knowledge* to *creativity* as a “key buzzword for regeneration” within the narrative of capital at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries.⁵⁷ They also say that this is “true not only in the West but also in developing economies, where creativity is seen as a key to fast-track modernization, as well as in China, where creativity is seen as a necessary step in the passage from a low-labour cost-manufacturing centre to a new economy”.⁵⁸ In relation to China they make a reference to Andrew Ross.⁵⁹ However, as their title clearly says, the truth of the matter is that we are in the midst of a creativity hoax. First of all, as they point out, there is no longer a distinction between creative and non-creative occupations. This really means, as I was noting above, that creativity becomes a necessity. Morgan and Nelligan say, “To survive, to maintain some semblance of continuity in working life in the face of underemployment or unemployment, often means that workers have to learn how to sell their skills in volatile marketplaces, to become entrepreneurial.”⁶⁰ They call this figure of labour “*labile labour*: mobile, spontaneous, malleable and capable of being aroused by new vocational possibilities.”⁶¹ We have already seen this in relation to the debt society, with a reference to Lazzarato’s book on this issue, and we will say more about it later by looking at an interesting take by Hardt and Negri on the figure of the entrepreneur. What is important now is to note Morgan and Nelligan’s central argument, which is that “the idea of creative economy is in part a discursive trick concerned with promoting flexibility and mobility of labour. It deflects ambition and encourages workers to see their skills as transferable and abstract rather than particular and grounded.”⁶² Indeed, “Capitalism’s co-option of the idea of creativity is one of the more spectacular discursive operations of recent history.”⁶³ They also say that this co-option “conceals the bohemian tradition that associates art with resistance to capitalism.”⁶⁴ As we have seen with some references to Marx’s *Grundrisse* about abstract labour, this is precisely what capital does, though in the age of finance and the gig economy the extraction of value, as Hardt and Negri point out, happens not simply by removing from labour all the characteristics of art, but by financial capital’s own “abstraction from production and its capacity to rule at a distance”.⁶⁵ They explain, “The key to

finance—and capitalist accumulation as a whole—is how value is extracted from wealth that resides elsewhere, both the wealth of the earth and the wealth that results from social cooperation and interaction. This is the link between abstraction and extraction.⁶⁶ The illusion of a diffused creativity is indeed very often the mask for a conformity brought about by a subtle discipline and methods of control whose aim is the production of what Michel Foucault called *docile bodies*, obedient and useful at the same time—indeed, useful because obedient.⁶⁷ This, however, does not eliminate the possibility of creativity as rupture and as a subjective power for radical change.

4. Sovereignty and Representation

The issue of precarity is also taken up by Gregory Sholette in *Dark Matter* (2010).⁶⁸ Sholette also speaks of the *social factory* and “the politics of invisibility”, which obviously create an illusory dimension of freedom and creativity.⁶⁹ Very pointedly, he says that “enterprise culture requires a kind of enforced creativity that is imposed on all forms of labour”.⁷⁰ Moreover, as Stephen Shukaitis says, “The arts world becomes a laboratory where the post-Fordist ethic is developed and then generalized beyond it.”⁷¹ This is a very important point, because it helps us bridge the discursive gap between art and labour, as if they were two completely different forms of human activity, irreducible to one another. To repeat a thought we have already considered above, but that is put very well by Sholette, “Workers, whose livelihoods have been made increasingly precarious by the collapse of the traditional social welfare state, are expected to be forever ready to retrain themselves at their own expense (or their own debt), to labour continuously even when at home or on vacation, and finally, they are expected to be constantly creative, to think like an artist.”⁷² The debt and gig economy again! A society in which what is common is really the paradoxical figure of a creativity that has become pure abstraction, being the same in order to be different, and a conformity that leads into a deformity of the soul. Sholette acknowledges the new link between creativity and value, which is the same as what Hardt and Negri address as the abstraction/extraction nexus in the age of finance, the capture and extraction of value from social production.⁷³ In this sense, the deformity of souls is also a deformity of bodies, just as Marx says in an amazing passage of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1944): “It is true that labor produces marvels for the rich, but it produces privation for the worker. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It produces beauty, but deformity for the worker. It replaces labor by machines, but it casts some of the workers back into barbarous forms of labor and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, but it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker”.⁷⁴ Indeed, he also writes, “the more his product is shaped, the more misshapen the worker.”⁷⁵ Yet, it is precisely this removal into the realm of abstraction, this forced invisibility, which, even in a distorted way, makes things visible again. This new visibility depends on the “sheer abundance and precariousness” of “this apparent surplus army” of labour and art⁷⁶—this *labile labour* for Morgan and Nelligan, as we have seen. Sholette says, “Young artists, often working collectively, have begun to address their relationship to work”,⁷⁷ demanding a wage, in a move similar to the wages for housework movement, in what Sholette calls an “*other productivity*”.⁷⁸

For Debord, art’s decay indicates that “a new common language has yet to be found”.⁷⁹ This “new common language,” which is *praxis* and *poiesis* at the same time, is now found at the level of everyday life, in the context of life that has become work, of work that has become life—in the biopolitical sphere, suspended between hope and despair. The question of a common language, or simply of the common, has to do with representation, sovereignty, and care. I have already noted how representation and care are opposites, but this relationship of opposition also applies to sovereignty and care.⁸⁰ Indeed, representation and sovereignty are very closely related. All sovereignty includes representation, and all representation certainly has moments of sovereignty. The new common language sought by Debord takes the form of constituent power in the sense in which Hardt and Negri reconceptualise it in *Assembly*, as “a widespread and multitudinous germination of the desire for

freedom and equality.”⁸¹ They speak of decision-making powers outside the paradigm of sovereignty and representation, as a way of transforming society according to “a right to the common”.⁸² They call this constituent power “a composition of diverse constituent singularities”⁸³ and stress the fact that it is “no longer compatible with representation and sovereignty”.⁸⁴ This critique of sovereignty and representation is very important, because even today we are far from having effectively taken distance from it, at the institutional level as well as—sadly—often in social movements. It is true that, as Hardt and Negri say, “the democratic claims of political representation are becoming ever more widely recognized as hollow and, similarly, speaking in the name of others is becoming proscribed in social movements.”⁸⁵ This is certainly an important and visible tendency. Yet, the destruction of old forms of power and domination, based on sovereignty and representation, what they later call a “destituent project”,⁸⁶ is of course still under way—far from having been accomplished, and those entrenched institutional and cultural claims to representing others and deciding about the desire and freedom of others are still very strong. An instance of this is the sense of entitlement inherent in the structures of patriarchy and whiteness, as is well known.⁸⁷ Hardt and Negri’s important notion of the invention of non-sovereign institutions,⁸⁸ which is part of the constituent project,⁸⁹ constitutes the site of current and future struggles for a powerful political ontology, which is poetic and practical at the same time: a transfiguration, a reconfiguration, or a transformation and reconstitution of social existence as a whole. Obviously, this project rules out a nostalgic return to the past, which would be precisely a move backwards rather than forwards. Hardt and Negri are also very adamant about this extremely important point, often misunderstood by those who pose as leaders in social movements. They say, “Recognizing, however, that the violent and bloody construction of private property throughout the world involved the suppression of social forms of sharing wealth—land, most importantly—should not lead us to conceive the common in terms of precapitalist social forms or to yearn for their re-creation.”⁹⁰ As I have noted, this is sadly often not understood, and especially in those experiences of a return to the land and to—a romanticised conception of—nature, there is at times a tendency, at the theoretical as well as practical level, of such a re-creation—I know this from direct experience. Yet, Hardt and Negri point out, “In many cases the precapitalist forms of community and systems for sharing wealth were characterized by disgusting, patriarchal, hierarchical modes of division and control.” And they conclude: “Instead of gazing back prior to capitalist private property we need to look beyond it.”⁹¹ This is also the meaning of a new common language outside of the paradigm of sovereignty and representation—a language of immediacy, of the emancipation of the senses, and of true aesthetic—*transvaluated*—value. This is of course the positive way in which art and labour, creativity and habit, can cooperate again—perhaps breaking their confinement in abstraction and value. Obviously, these non-sovereign institutions must be true artworks, not a mere formal rearrangement of the same. As Hardt and Negri say, this new constituent power “must be mixed with social behaviors and new technologies of subsistence, resistance, and transformation of life.”⁹² More than just a political reality, it goes to the bottom of social, everyday life, to the material and singular conditions of existence—without becoming a matter of identity.

5. Spinning: the Production of Subjectivities

But what is art proper? For Heidegger, we need to distinguish between creating and making: creating has its end in itself; making has an end other than itself. Both belong to *poiesis*, to production as “bringing forth”. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger distinguishes between creating and mere making.⁹³ He says, “We think of creation as a bringing forth. But the making of equipment, too, is a bringing forth. Handicraft... does not, to be sure, create works, not even when we contrast, as we must, the handmade with the factory product”.⁹⁴ Then he asks, “But what is it that distinguishes bringing forth as creation from bringing forth in the mode of making?”⁹⁵ What distinguishes them, for Heidegger, is poetry: “The Nature *Wesen* of art is poetry. The nature *Wesen* of poetry is the founding of truth.”⁹⁶ Perhaps today there is no longer creation in the sense understood by

Heidegger and all bringing forth happens in the mode of making—and a *machinic*, algorithmic, making at that. Perhaps part of the problem is that, as Hardt and Negri point out, Heidegger’s viewpoint is “preindustrial and even precapitalist”.⁹⁷ Yet, the notion of creativity cannot be left to neoliberal ideology, “the Eureka myth” of Silicon Valley,⁹⁸ and the injunction to become one’s own entrepreneur under penalty of debt and death. As Hardt and Negri say, living labour exceeds this biopolitical framing. They say that “as it becomes an increasingly social power, living labour (and life activity more generally) operates as an ever more independent activity, outside the structures of discipline that capital commands.”⁹⁹ This is what is ultimately responsible for the production of new subjectivities, singularities of rupture. In my book *Labour of Fire*, the argument was that creative labour is the form of living labour that is not productive in the sense of capital, namely, neither-productive-nor-unproductive. The concept of creativity has certainly been co-opted by neoliberalism today, yet that does not mean that its potency—the potency of living and creative labour—has ceased to exist as a mode of disruption and transformation. On the contrary, it has reached an inner depth, the level of a subterranean fire, where labour returns to itself, and art also returns to itself—a return which is equally a revolving and spinning. This is what is usually known as the production of subjectivities, or singularities, which is perhaps the most important aspect of the relationship between art and labour today. This is also what, as we have seen, eminently happens at the border, at any border.

Speaking of the social factory, a concept we have already seen above, Morgan and Nelligan say that consumers “are also, in a sense, producers (e.g. as in online gaming) and that labour happens away from the factory floor in the traditional sense.”¹⁰⁰ They say that a new category of workers, with special, “creative”, skills and habits “play a central role in the production chain because symbolic and knowledge inputs contribute much more to a commodity’s value than does the labour of those on the assembly lines.”¹⁰¹ Obviously, as virtually all those who write on these issues do, Morgan and Nelligan do not deny the importance that production as such, in the factory and on the assembly lines, still has. Yet, perhaps the most important aspect of this new and in some ways predominant mode of production is not so much the value of the commodity—as an external object—as it is that of the subjectivity being produced. The ambivalence of the creative dimension and value—and potential alienation—of this subjectivity is obvious; so are the common ground and univocal relationship among people active in completely different—perhaps apparently unrelated—sectors of the new economy. In an interesting chapter of *Border as Method* (2013), titled “Figures of Labour”, Mezzadra and Neilson consider the two figures of the care worker and the financial trader. They say, “These two groups of workers—carers and traders—occupy seemingly opposite ends of the world labour spectrum in terms of gender, earnings, and the relative assignment of bodily and cognitive tasks. But they are materially and symbolically linked within the global multiplication of labour.”¹⁰² Despite the important differences between the two groups of workers—most important of all, the obvious fact that “traders are an extremely privileged category of workers”¹⁰³—just like migrant care workers, “traders sell not a predefined set of personality traits but their ability or potential to *become* the right person, the one required by their employers (or by the market) as circumstances change.”¹⁰⁴ What is important is the stress on the creative, entrepreneurial injunction to become a certain singularity under conditions that—as Lordon also points out—are always conditions of capture, though the singularity, or subjectivity, of either the trader or the carer has a completely different position (and a different value) within the neoliberal economy.¹⁰⁵ “The trader is”, of course, “a particular kind of worker whose labour produces a subjectivity that is forever becoming a capitalist.”¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, in any given society or community, migrant care workers always remain, to various degrees, at the margins of the economy and society, included as the excluded ones—an inclusion which is, as in the case of the total institutions like the prison, one of absolute capture. Moreover, Mezzadra and Neilson say with a reference to Bridget Anderson, employers are in this case ultimately buying the whole body, “the whole person” of the worker.¹⁰⁷ Yet, Mezzadra and Neilson add, “The implicit threat on blackmail or even sabotage that haunts the payment of traders’ bonuses is a reverse image of the reality of

coercion produced by the combination of labour regulation, border, and visa regimes that apply to care workers and other less skilled migrants”.¹⁰⁸ Importantly, however, in their recasting of the logic of inclusion and exclusion, Mezzadra and Neilson also say that the migrant worker, and in particular the “illegal” migrant “is not only subject to exclusion but also becomes a key actor in reshaping, contesting, and redefining the borders of citizenship.”¹⁰⁹

6. Care: Exiting Subjection

We have seen the importance of the production of subjectivity. As Mezzadra and Neilson say, “elaborating on Foucauldian terms... subjectivity is a battleground, where multiple devices of subjection are confronted with practices of subjectivation.”¹¹⁰ This is central to the concept of subjectivity. On the one hand, we are subjected to power, the system, and so on. On the other, we have this power—and that is living labour as an ontological power—to become subjects, agents; the power to resist, fight back and create something new. This living labour, labour power, is “precisely a form of power that exceeds, and in a certain sense precedes, processes of discipline and control, dispossession and exploitation.”¹¹¹ As Mezzadra and Neilson say, this “means to take seriously the two senses of the genitive in the phrase ‘production of subjectivity’”, and thus the twofold process of subjection and subjectivation.¹¹² The subject is precisely the transindividual reality—a singularity— between subjection and subjectivation. Mezzadra and Neilson elaborate on these themes with important references to the work of Jacques Rancière, especially his notion of “the part of those who have no part” from *Dis-Agreement* (1998)¹¹³—and they note how “it is easy to see that ‘illegal’ migrants are among the most obvious candidates to play the role of the part with no part”¹¹⁴—and the work of Balibar, among others. Of Balibar, they stress the link he establishes between *sovereignty* and *subjection* in the making of what then appears as the free individual¹¹⁵—but should really be, Balibar says, *the transindividual*, as we have seen above.¹¹⁶ Yet, what is of particular importance in Mezzadra and Neilson’s book for our discourse on art and labour is the idea that subjectivity cannot be completely determined, in a sovereign fashion, by techniques of subjection. In fact, subjectivity truly appears as and through the living modality of rupture, the exit from a situation of subjection, and the transforming—this time truly *creative*—project of subjectivation. This is of course also the case in the book by Hardt and Negri we have been reading, as well as in many other authors dealing with these issues. In particular, Hardt and Negri in this sense completely reconceptualise the notion of the entrepreneur and speak of “entrepreneurship of the multitude”.¹¹⁷ One may be taken aback by this at first, for the entrepreneur seems to be a key figure of neoliberal ideology, and as Lazzarato correctly says, we live today under the injunction to become entrepreneurs of the self in the new debt economy.¹¹⁸ Hardt and Negri acknowledge that; yet, in a bold move, they say they “want to insist that first and foremost entrepreneurship belongs to the multitude, and names the multitude’s capacities for cooperative social production and reproduction.”¹¹⁹ For them, this is not at all a way of updating our vocabulary and bringing it to match that of neoliberal ideology. On the contrary, as they argue, it is a way “to take ... back and claim... as our own” words that have been “diverted and distorted” by capital and its ideology.¹²⁰ This is certainly very relevant to what we were saying above about the concept of creativity, the word “creative”, but also the figure of the artist in general. Indeed, as Morgan and Nelligan say, “capitalism’s belated conversion to the gospel of creativity is profoundly ironic”.¹²¹ This is a central point in our essay. The idea is not to succumb to subjection, but rather to subvert its conditions and undertake a project of transfiguration and transformation of singularities. In fact, what must be understood by the concept of multitude are not at all crowds of people, the “disunited multitude,” which inspired fear in Thomas Hobbes,¹²² but rather, in light of the concept of transindividuality, singularities. This multitude, in fact, is neither united nor disunited, but is open to the singularity of the common.

In a similarly bold—and seemingly problematic—way, Mezzadra and Neilson recast the ideas of the border and No Border struggles in the context of the twofold process of subjection and subjectivation, and thus of the

subjectivity of migrants. They say, “No Border struggles sometimes approach the border as an object to be eliminated rather than as a bundle of social relations that involve the active subjectivity of border crossers as much as the interdictory efforts of border police and other control agencies. This can give rise to a certain fixation on power and domination that paradoxically risks reinforcing the spectacle of the border.”¹²³ They continue, “However, we do not think that the fabrication of the common always and in all circumstances requires or can reflect the elimination of borders.”¹²⁴ For them, “it is the quality of the social relations that are constituted and reproduced by and through borders that matters.”¹²⁵ Just as in Hardt and Negri, the main question here is that of a transformative political project geared towards the production of new singularities and the construction of the common. For this, Mezzadra and Neilson note that it is important to understand “how the border is productive of subjectivity, rather than acting as a mere limit on already-formed subjects.”¹²⁶ The production of subjectivity cuts across the whole spectrum of life and labour activities. This is so, because ultimately the ontological power that living labour is constitutes the univocal ground of the social.¹²⁷ Capital will continue to distinguish between productive and unproductive activities. It will also continue to completely overlook the importance of those reproductive activities without which no everyday life situation can sustain itself, let alone flourish and thrive. In this sense, housework, the work of care, attention, and affective labour in general, will continue to be undervalued, underpaid or totally unpaid, if acknowledged at all. The same is true for the genuinely creative activities—those of reproduction constituting an important part of them—which are marginalised as the idea of creativity becomes a catchword for the gig economy. The point is that artistic, creative labour is not what the neoliberal, gig economy says; and this is not so because artistic, creative labour is a type of activity reserved for the few engaging in established artistic fields, the fine arts, but rather because it covers a much larger spectrum of life activities, if not all of them, to various degrees. In particular, the rhythmic activities of social and everyday life, those of reproduction such as childcare work or the work of care in general, have to be inherently creative, and thus artistic. In her *Love’s Labour’s* (1999) personal narrative chapter, speaking of her disabled daughter, Sesha, and her caretaker, Peggy, Eva Feder Kittay says, “From one young woman, I learned that to enter a child’s world, especially one as attenuated as Sesha’s, required *a talent as precious as an artist’s*.”¹²⁸ She continues, “Childcare work has been viewed as one of the least skillful occupations, second only to janitorial work. To see an exceptional childcare worker engage a child dispels, in an instant, such devaluation of this oldest and most universal of women’s work.”¹²⁹ In fact, all life and labour activities can share in the creative, artistic modality—and they all do to various degrees, though often in a rather unacknowledged way. In this sense, the dimension of care is essential and it should be seen as a univocal, or transversal, modality of social relations—certainly informing labouring and artistic activities. Probably, it is easy to see how all art, all artistic activity, must have forms of care at its centre and throughout. It might be more difficult to always see care as inherent in other life and work activities. Yet, this should not exclude those activities from sharing in the same paradigm of attention and care, which can perhaps be taken for granted when we think and speak about art. Indeed, as Diemut Elizabeth Bubeck argues, “*persona carans* could replace *homo economicus* as the individual theorized in social and political theory.”¹³⁰ This would certainly be the case when the paradigm of social interaction is one of cooperation, solidarity, and transindividuality. Thus, if I can put it this way, care really is the middle term between art and labour. This means that care, including the care of the self, provides an exit from the logic of subjection and subsumption. In truth, through care, both art and labour return to themselves, to their original ontological—and ethical—disposition and power. It is in and through care—which involves the moments of desire, fear—even of death—and work—as Hegel describes in the section on lordship and bondage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*¹³¹—that subversion and exit become possible. But for this to be the case, care needs to be subtracted from the logic of capital and patriarchy and be given the dignity and status that really belongs to it. That is to say, its potentiality and importance for the flourishing of society as a whole should be explicitly recognised. This is what in *Earthy Plenitudes* (2010) I term *dignity of individuation*, which is the truth and justice of art and labour, among other significant moments of human life activities. The point is to

see care not as an activity belonging to menial types of labour, but as an ontological power for social transformation, which is essentially creative. Obviously, this is very far from the way in which neoliberal ideology uses words like creativity, art, and even care itself—as we have seen. In fact, in the neoliberal economy the use and abuse of “the model of care”, as Cristina Morini, among others, shows, have a completely different meaning. First of all, Morini highlights the “biopolitical dimension” that follows the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist mode of production. She calls the former “the age of measure (factory-based, rigid, stable, masculine)” and the latter “the age of quality (cognitive, relational, precarious, feminine).”¹³² This is the shift not only towards flexibility, but also towards affective labour and the feminisation of labour. In the neoliberal economy, the distinction between work and non-work becomes thinner or altogether disappears.¹³³ The concept of “care”, Morini says—and here she puts the word in quotation marks—is instrumental to the “affirmation of the devastating sovereign logic of exchange value... that seeks to introduce ethics in the productive arena.”¹³⁴ Morini says, “*The labour of care embodies the crisis of the measure of the value of labour today.*”¹³⁵ In this sense, “women’s ‘unpaid work’ (the labour of reproduction and care) becomes an interesting archetype of contemporary production.”¹³⁶ As we have seen, the same happens with the concept of creativity, adopted by capital and used for its own purposes and advantages. In fact, to go back to Morgan and Nelligan, for labour “creativity has its roots in play and curiosity”.¹³⁷ For capital, it becomes an organising concept of a completely different kind. Yet, the point, as we will soon see, is that of translating or retranslating words and concepts in view of desired social changes and the struggle for them.

7. The Cloud and the Abyss

This brings us back to the figure of the entrepreneur. For Hardt and Negri, “What is missing and mystified by this neoliberal entrepreneurship... are the mechanisms and relations of cooperation that animate social production and reproduction”.¹³⁸ On the other hand, the entrepreneurship they present “points toward the self-organization and self-governance of the multitude”.¹³⁹ They go back to the question of the word “entrepreneurship” in a more general comment on translation as “taking back and giving new significance to existing” words. Here, in particular, they see translation as a way of situating “singularities in the common; it is a kind of commoning”.¹⁴⁰ They make a special reference to the often terrifying experience of migrants, “who play such a fundamental role in shaping the contemporary world” and who “demonstrate the central connections between the processes of translation and the experience of ‘commoning’”.¹⁴¹ They say that migrants “constitute a new common without ever losing their singularities. Through processes of translation, the singularities together form a multitude”.¹⁴² This is an important illustration of this radically different idea of entrepreneurship, one of the multitude, of singularities, in which the potentially subversive and truly creative power of a type of labour that is not even acknowledged as such can be appreciated. The labour of migrants, even before they reach their final destination (if they do)—all the labour entailed in leaving one’s country, crossing oceans and deserts, facing all forms of institutional and non-institutional violence, and so on—is part of the notion of the multiplication of labour central in Mezzadra and Neilson. In their work, Mezzadra and Neilson also address the question of translation “more in a conceptual than a linguistic sense”.¹⁴³ In the final chapter of *Border as Method* (2013), titled “Translating the Common”, Mezzadra and Neilson first of all address the question of “the fabrication of the common”, as we have already seen above, in relation to the existence of borders as a question of method: capital’s method or the method of the multitude.¹⁴⁴ They say that “the border is a method for capital. But to posit border as a concept for radical political thought and action is not merely to make subversive use of the master’s tools. It is, rather, to point to the necessity of taking capital’s use of the border as a serious and inescapable point of the contention.”¹⁴⁵ The work of art, the aesthetic as well as political and social endeavour for the transformation of the present, the transfiguration of the future, can be understood—and undertaken—as a labour of translation in the etymological sense of bringing something over and across, and in this sense as the bringing forth, which *poiesis* essentially is,

and the transformative experience entailed in the working together of *poiesis* and *praxis*. It is in radical projects such as this that the essential relation between art and labour is best discerned. Here, it is not a question of creativity in the neoliberal sense of the word, but rather of the ontological power of creation, a power which, being not simply *physis*, but also *praxis*, has care at its innermost core. However, it is also important to note that the rejection of the neoliberal notion of creativity should not imply a return to a past in which creativity and art were understood as the privilege of the few. In this sense, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello are correct in saying that “we must first of all set aside the aristocratic rejection of any democratization—denounced as vulgarization—of the values of creativity, freedom and authenticity on which the distinctively artistic lifestyle rested when it was still generally regarded as exceptional.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, what is important is to find a radical kind of creativity, which can be projected forwards in a radical sense. It is in this sense that art and creativity—creative labour—will be neither an extension nor a negation of the empirical, but its transfiguration.¹⁴⁷

This is also a work of translation, of bringing over and across, of bringing forth something that is essentially different; it is a transcendence, yet one within the plane of immanence and empirical reality. In my discussion of Theodor W. Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) in the final chapter of *Labour of Fire*, I point out how for Adorno, first of all, “artistic labour is social labour”.¹⁴⁸ This means that creative or artistic labour is constitutive of society—it is part of labour’s ontological power. Adorno says, “The immanence of society in the artworks is the essential social relation of art, not the immanence of art in society”.¹⁴⁹ Yet in the network society, or what Boltanski and Chiapello call a *connexionist* world, made of links and ultimately networks, where a degree of democratisation exists by default, the immanence of society in the artworks, or in the works of technology, necessarily means a reshaping of the living, sensuous—in Marx’s sense¹⁵⁰—aspect of things, of human subjectivity as it interacts with the nonhuman world in general, and with machines in particular. New singularities are thus formed, or produced, transversally, or transindividually, linked and intertwined *in* and *as* new machinic assemblages. However, the point is that under the current system of capital, which is, as Lazzarato says, “an assemblage of assemblages”,¹⁵¹ singularities are lost in “individualization (subjection) and deindividualization (enslavement)”.¹⁵² The alternative is then to build a politics of singularities, which is, to quote Lazzarato again, “a politics beyond the human”, given that the human is precisely this individualised and deindividualised (subjected and enslaved) entity.¹⁵³

An interesting point made by Hardt and Negri, with a reference to Spinoza and Gilbert Simondon, is that “humans and machines belong to the same ontological plane”.¹⁵⁴ They use this insight to recast the notions of fixed capital, which is, they say, quoting Marx from the *Grundrisse*, “man himself”, and the composition of capital.¹⁵⁵ Today, obviously, the question of the machine has to be seen not only in terms of mechanisation and automation, but also, and perhaps particularly, in terms of digitisation. Thus, algorithms are part of this discourse. Hardt and Negri say that an algorithm “is fixed capital, a machine that is born of social, cooperative intelligence, a product of ‘general intellect,’... which has the power of living labour” as its foundation.¹⁵⁶ They stress that “without living labour there is no algorithm”.¹⁵⁷ It is in this sense that there is always a transindividual structure—and ontology—in the *machinic*, which “never refers to an individual, isolated machine but always an assemblage”.¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, Hardt and Negri point out the difference between the multitude and the machinic assemblage: the former is understood “exclusively in terms of human singularities”; the latter is “composed of a wider range of beings, human and nonhuman”.¹⁵⁹ They are both important for a discourse on art and labour today, and certainly the notion of a machinic assemblage is crucial, for it highlights the new poetic ontology, and the poetic experience, of the present. It is now no longer a question of being an appendage to the machine, thus of alienation. As Gerald Raunig says, “Future machinic environments might be more readily conceived in terms of the logic of enveloping than of appending or physically touching.”¹⁶⁰ The cloud replaces the appendage. Raunig speaks of “an endless (self-)enveloping of every single person”.¹⁶¹ Speaking of the therein as possibly “the

instrument of the future”, he says that we “are not playing instruments, but rather playing with them, the way children play with other children, with things and machines”.¹⁶² The main modality is that of “Self-assembling and assembling the assemblage”.¹⁶³ Above I spoke about a new poetic ontology and a new poetic experience; they still retain the dimension of *danger*, which is proper to them. There is a danger, as we know from Heidegger—which poets are perhaps closer to.¹⁶⁴ Yet, today the danger itself is, so to speak, democratised—at least, this type of danger is. The poets themselves are the many singularities. Perhaps the danger is no longer only constituted by the presence of the abyss, but of the cloud as well. Yet, the experience remains one of freedom and the production of being. Indeed, with the notion of enveloping—still a transindividual notion—we are back at the idea of the border as a site of production of subjectivities, or singularities. As Jean-Luc Nancy says in *The Experience of Freedom* (1993), the experience of freedom, as “the experience of experience,” or “experience itself,” is precisely “trying the self at the self’s border,” and in this sense it is “the passage of limit”.¹⁶⁵ It is “the *peril* of the crossed limit”.¹⁶⁶ In fact, as Peter Fenves notes, in his foreword, “The word ‘experience,’ as Nancy reminds us, once had the sense of a perilous traversing (*peirō*) of the limit (*peras*)”.¹⁶⁷ As Nancy says, this experience is “existence—rather than the experience of existence”.¹⁶⁸ The self, even in the machinic assemblage (and particularly so), which is always at the intersection of art and labour, *poiesis* and *praxis*, is also always transindividual. Existence, Nancy says, is always coexistence, being-with. Indeed, being is always being-with. As he says in a highly suggestive sentence, “To exist is a matter of going into exile”.¹⁶⁹ We find the border again, and production of ever-new subjectivity, or singularity.

The danger: as Heidegger says, “What is dangerous is not technology”.¹⁷⁰ The danger is what Heidegger calls “Enframing,” the “essence of modern technology”,¹⁷¹ or the “essence of technology”,¹⁷² which is different from technology itself. Indeed, the essence of technology is not technological. The Enframing, rather than a framing—a movement of closure—is the Open, where, for Heidegger, the human being stands. It is in this sense that it represents a danger, and indeed, “danger as such”, or “the supreme danger”¹⁷³—yet a necessary one. It is easy to see that this Enframing, this open space, is the border, as we have described it. The “dis”—and, essentially, the “this”—we mentioned at the outset of this essay. Heidegger quotes Hölderlin, for whom, as we have seen, the danger and the saving power come together. The danger is what challenges one, and this is also what Enframing essentially is: a challenging, but a challenging “which endures”.¹⁷⁴ In this enduring, for Heidegger, something comes to presence. This is not simply technology in a narrow sense, but the poetic bringing forth, which, for Heidegger, *technē* is, which applies (or used to apply) equally to technology and art. To conclude with Heidegger’s problematisation of the place of art vis-à-vis technology, his notion of the “realm” of art,¹⁷⁵ we note that this realm is precisely one of a “decisive confrontation”, which is “on the one hand akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it.”¹⁷⁶ We find again the rupture present in the singularity of art itself, which we have seen at the outset. The fact that art is, and must be, against itself, and yet remains the fundamentally poetic modality of bringing forth, of making an essential difference at the objective and subjective levels, as the “dis/” of “this”, that is to say, the rupture itself and the transversal force of any crossing, the division and multiplication within as “this”, its composition and, truly, decomposition.¹⁷⁷

8. What is *This*?

I hope it is at this point evident that there has possibly never been a more adequate time to speak of art and labour together—and against each other. In fact, the word “together” does not name a quiet and stable unity, but the co-belonging of the two expressions of human sensuous, affective activities in a state of insecurity, precarity, and disposability. It is here that the twofold movement of *refusal* and *re-fusing* highlighted by Shukaitis,¹⁷⁸ which we have mentioned above—a movement driven by a desire to produce something radically new, a new transindividual *this*, essentially different, a new singularity—becomes very important. Indeed, the

apparent state of unity of art and labour in the “creative” economy—a state, again of insecurity, precarity and disposability—does not *stay*; it does not stand firm, does not abide. It is thus rather a stage in a process that borders on other processes. It is the constant unfolding, perhaps in its solitude, of what each time individuates itself as such and yet goes beyond itself in a new process of transindividuation. The individuating “it” (or *this*) is itself a plurality of instances or occurrences: a relation of relations, which makes singularity proper. It is in fact a matter of “multiple processes of transformation”.¹⁷⁹ The transindividual is the singular. It is in this sense that we have called into question the politics and ontology of number—and will do so again in a future work. Indeed, it is never *one* (the One), but *many* entering into the constitution of any given *this*. As Hardt and Negri say, “The One never produces”.¹⁸⁰ The concept of *thisness* (*haecceitas*), formulated by Duns Scotus as the contraction of the most simple and common, the contraction of being into any individuating instance,¹⁸¹ and understood by Leibniz as the unity of all predicates belonging in a subject, of all occurrences,¹⁸² reveals the ontological reality of individuation as transindividuation: the presence of the plural in the singular, of the pre-individual and transindividual in whatever presents itself each time as *this*. Then, perhaps *this* can never be found. Its ambiguity and complexity are also made clear in René Magritte’s painting, *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*, and in Michel Foucault’s short book on it by the same title.¹⁸³ *This* is always—at least potentially—*another*, perhaps more or less than itself. It is unstable—and borderline. It is certainly not once and for all *this one*. Perhaps the truth lies in the fact that it is simply *not one*, *no one*; it is less than one, or more than one, before or beyond itself, at the border with what is not—because it is no longer or not yet—and with what is different from itself. Thus, in Magritte’s painting the pipe is obviously nowhere to be found, and the very stability of *this*, which yet is clearly—here and now—in front of us, is called into question. What is *this*? And perhaps the One, which is neither of praxis nor *poiesis*, neither of labour nor art, will try its best to dispose of it.

Footnotes

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9. Balibar, *Politics*, p. 78.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

11. Mezzadra and Neilson, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
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87. See Hardt and Negri's remark on whiteness, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
88. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-39.
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96. *Ibid.*, p. 93. See my discussion in Chapter Four of Gulli, *Labour of Fire*.
97. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.* p. 109.
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109. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
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123. Mezzadra and Neilson, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
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127. I would here again like to refer to Gulli, *Labour of Fire*.
128. Kittay, Eva Feder. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*. New York, NY: Routledge. 1999. pp. 155-156.
129. *Ibid.*, p. 116. See my discussion of these issues, including disability, care, and so-called "women's work" in the final chapter of Gulli, *Earthly Plenitudes*.
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131. Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1977. pp. 111-119.
132. Morini, Cristina. *Per amore o per forza: Femminilizzazione del lavoro e biopolitiche del corpo*. Verona: Ombre corte. 2010. p. 129. The translation of all passages from Morini's book is my own.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
135. *Ibid.*, p. 132; emphasis in the original.
136. *Ibid.*
137. Morgan and Nelligan, *op. cit.*, Loc. 583.
138. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
139. *Ibid.*, p. 146. Stevphen Shukaitis, who read this essay, pointed out some difficulties with Hardt and Negri's notion of the entrepreneurship of the multitude. In his review of my essay, he wrote, "I like the response here about not succumbing to subjection but rather transfiguring of singularities, but given all the invested ideological weight in the existing notion of entrepreneurship, that would seem to be a much more difficult task than it seems at first" (electronic communication). I totally agree with this. However, the etymology of the word "entrepreneur", and the French verb "entreprendre", from the Latin "inter prehendere", shows that its meaning can be—perhaps only as a matter of provocation and confrontation—redirected towards a more fruitful end. I remind the reader that here the issue is also, and in particular, that of conceptual translation. It strikes me that this might not be altogether dissimilar from the way in which the word "occupy" acquired an entirely new and wholly positive meaning with the Occupy Wall Street movement, and its many variants, some years ago. On the other hand, I see the inherent difficulties of such re-appropriation, and I think this particular concept—entrepreneurship of the multitude—will likely remain unpalatable and difficult to use, like, say, the concept of immaterial labour—but even more so. Yet, it perhaps serves a function in the confrontation with neoliberal

ideology and the deconstruction of its assumptions and constructs.

140. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
141. *Ibid.*
142. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
143. Mezzadra and Neilson, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
144. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
145. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
146. Boltanski, Luc and Ève Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Gregory Elliott. London and New York: Verso. 2018 1999. p. 420.
147. See Gulli, *Labour of Fire*, p. 179.
148. Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. 1997. p. 236.
149. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
150. Marx, Karl. "Concerning Feuerbach". In *Early Writings*. Trans. Rodney Livingston and Gregor Brenton. New York, NY: Vintage Books. p. 421.
151. Lazzarato, Maurizio. *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*. Trans. Joshua David Jordan. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e). 2014. p. 46
152. *Ibid.*
153. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
154. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
155. (Marx 1973: 712; Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
156. "General intellect" is of course Marx's phrase from the *Grundrisse*, p. 706. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 118
157. Hardt and Negri, *ibid.*
158. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
159. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
160. Raunig, Gerald. *Dividuum: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution*. Trans. Aileen Derieg. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e). 2016.
161. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
162. *Ibid.*
163. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
164. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*; and Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. New York, NY: Harper and Row. 1977.
165. Nancy, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
166. *Ibid.*,
167. Fenves, Peter, in Nancy, *op. cit.*, p. xx.
168. Nancy, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
169. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
170. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 28.
171. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
172. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
173. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
174. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
175. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

176. *Ibid.*
177. I owe the concept of *decomposition* to Alexander Edwards (personal communication). Alexander is a student of mine and a young artist, who practises decomposition in his installations and paintings, especially in relation to the issue of digital technology.
178. Shukaitis, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
179. Read, *op. cit.*, p. 289.
180. Hardt and Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
181. Duns Scotus, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
182. Leibniz, *op. cit.*
183. Foucault, Michel. *This Is Not a Pipe*. Trans. James Harkness. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 1982 1973.